# **<u>Title:</u>** Skill-Building Course: Surroundings

<u>Description:</u> This course will assist a Whole Health Coach or other educator working with Veterans who would like to incorporate "Surroundings" into their Personal Health Plans. It reviews eight different "subtopics" related to this aspect of self-care. This is always a topic that people find quite interesting, perhaps in part because they rarely talk about it with members of their health care team.

### **Objectives and Key Points**

- List the different ways that our surroundings can affect our lives at home, at work, emotionally, in healing spaces, and in other situations
- Discuss some of the health benefits of improving surroundings
- Practice a mindful awareness exercise related to "A Healing Space"
- Experience a demonstration related to emotional surroundings either animalassisted therapy or tips from a mental health professional about emotional health
- Identify local resources that can support Veterans with this aspect of self care at a local level
- Create a Personal Health Plan focused on one aspect of one's individual surroundings

#### Sample Agenda (total time 60-80 minutes)\*

- Introductions (5 minutes)
- Different surroundings and how they affect health (10 minutes)
- Partner exercise discussing what it is like to have healthy surroundings (5 minutes)
- Optional: Self-Assessment about Surroundings (10 minutes)
- Discussion about living space/home environment (5 minutes)
- Organization (5 minutes)
- Work surroundings (5 minutes)
- Emotional surroundings with demonstration (animal assisted therapy or mental health provider discussion) (10 minutes)
- Reducing toxins (5 minutes)
- Partner activity: Setting a Surroundings goal, large group sharing (10-15 minutes)
- Wrap up, questions, and evaluations

\*To keep down at 60 minutes, have them fill out the optional "Assessing Your Surroundings" form in advance, or while they are waiting for the class to begin. Or, you can leave that part out.

#### **Preparation**

- 1. Pre-Reading for Instructors
  - Passport to Whole Health, Chapter 6. Surroundings. Available at <a href="https://wholehealth.wiscweb.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/414/2018/09/Passport-to-Whole-Health-3rd-Edition-2018.pdf">https://wholehealth.wiscweb.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/414/2018/09/Passport-to-Whole-Health-3rd-Edition-2018.pdf</a>. Pay particular attention to the research featured in the chapter. It might

- help to keep a listing of all the different possible ideas for making one small change. See also the list of resources at the end of the *Passport* chapter
- The Whole Health Education Website has a number of additional materials that are worth a look. <a href="https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/overviews/surroundings/">https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/overviews/surroundings/</a>. Especially relevant are the sections on Detoxification and Healing Spaces

### 2. Prepare course materials and handouts

- Each participant will receive a copy of the Veteran Handout designed to accompany this course
- You may wish to provide some of the Veteran handouts related to Surroundings, available at <a href="https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/veteran-handouts/index.asp#surroundings">https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/veteran-handouts/index.asp#surroundings</a>
- It may be easiest to have handouts at their seats, or you can pass them around later Review the handout in advance, so you can be ready for questions
- Be sure to have an evaluation form ready to give them at the end as well. You can use the general one created by the Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation

#### 3. Set up AV and other equipment

- Be prepared to share the PowerPoint slides related to this course. A guide to each of the individual slides is featured later in this document
- Connect with the AV support person at your site
- A flip chart and markers, or a dry erase board, may be helpful
- If you choose to show the video, you will need to have speakers attached to the computer you are presenting from
- It might be helpful to have a flipchart or dry erase board handy
- If you do not have a slide projector, you can simply take them through the Veteran handout after you give each person a copy. Alternatively, you can print out the slides and give them copies. Then, just take them through the slides, following the faculty guide

#### 4. Identify local and other resources

- Decide who can help you with the demonstration section and invite them to help you out
- Add to the slide set (and/or Veteran Handout) to include local resources, including
  - Are there any charity housekeeping services available in your community?
  - Where are the best natural areas to go outdoors
  - Are there any outdoor/nature activities sponsored by Recreational Therapy at your site, or by other groups?
  - o What programs are available for homeless Veterans in your area?
- Develop your own list of favorite resources

## Slide-By-Slide Guide



- Change this slide to incorporate your name, as well as the date and location of the presentation
- This is a good time to introduce yourself. Be sure to share your own title/role related to the VA and teaching
- Might be worth it to have the participants do quick introductions as well
- Note for them that "Surroundings" is not always a topic that comes up during a standard clinic visit, but it is very closely tied to health
- How physical and emotional surroundings affect your health
- Things you can do to improve your surroundings as part of you Personal Health Plan
- How to set a goal tied to your surroundings
- Where you can go (online, reading materials, experts) to learn even more
- This is the list of learning objectives for the course. You can review these in detail, or go quickly over them to save time. Bottom line: we will cover a lot of possibilities, and then each person will be encouraged to set a Surroundings goal they can have as part of their PHP
- As you move through, remember the subtitle for this circle is "Physical and Emotional." We'll discuss both, but emotional surroundings can be a little less clear to people

# Different Types of Surroundings

- Home
- Work
- Neighborhood and community
- · Emotional surroundings
- Nature
- · Climate/environment
- Healing Spaces



- Before you advance through the types of surroundings, invite the participants to list different places they go to on a regular basis, and how those places can affect their health
- Climate/environment is more global than the others, and while we don't spend a lot of time on it in this class, it is of course centrally important. Supporting the environment is supporting Whole Health



- Encourage people to pair up in groups of 2 or 3 to share first, then share some of their thoughts
- You can ask them to answer the question in terms of their own past experience, including when they were on active duty
- If there is hesitation, you can give a few examples from the next slide to get them started
- Reading the quotation is optional

### Surroundings: Why Bother?

Our surroundings affect our health

- · Sunlight and skin cancer
- · Light levels and mood
- · Smoking and lung cancer
- · Thalidomide and arm growth
- Meditation and genes
- And magnesium and number of eyes... If you are a fish

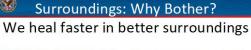


Photo: nationalgeographic.com



#### A couple of important points:

- No one argues that sunlight causes skin cancer over time. What can we do? We can avoid the environmental cause (cover up, use sunscreen), or we can bolster our resistance to being harmed by it (diet, exercise, stress management, etc.) A combination approach is likely best. That is true for most exposures
- Light levels not only combat seasonal affective problems, but they also can help with depression in general
- Thalidomide was a medicine to stop vomiting in pregnancy, but it causes horrible side effects. Babies exposed to it in the womb failed to grow arms
- Meditation increases telomere length. Telomeres are the ends of the chromosomes. The longer they are, the longer a person's lifespan, and the lower their risk of chronic disease
- Old experiments exposing fish eggs to magnesium chloride led to the development of one-eyed fish







What would your rather see from your hospital bed?

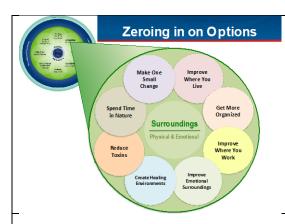
- Can do this as a group vote. Ask them who would want a hospital room with the view on the left? The right?
- There were a series of studies of people recovering from gall bladder surgery in Paoli, Pennsylvania.
   People had less pain and left the hospital sooner if they had the better views, all other things being equal

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#### **Group Discussion:**

What Makes for Good Surroundings?

- Work with a partner
- Take a few minutes each to talk about a place that feels healing to you
- Why do you like that place?
- What is one thing you could do to make other places where you spend time more like this place?
- Key points to make during the large group discussion:
  - Different people have different priorities for surroundings and what they like/need most
  - Even small improvements to a space can make a difference
- Invite a few people to share their thoughts with the large group



- Here are eight areas we can consider in more depth as we think about Surroundings for self-care
- There are many other options that aren't featured here. That is why we have the "Make One Small Change" circle. Anything you think of is fair game



- We'll move through each of these. The goal is to give you ideas about how to set a Surroundings Goal
- We'll start with one of the most important aspects of our lives where we live

# Thinking About Your Space

If you would like, you can fill out the form "Taking Stock: Assessing Your Surroundings." This can be a good way to get a conversation about Surroundings going with someone on your team, like a Peer Partner, health care provider, or Whole Health Coach



- \*This slide is optional. You can give them 10-15 minutes to complete the assessment and then talk about it as a group. It may take a little longer for some people, depending on reading level
- Be clear that they should show this form to someone who is on their care team, as appropriate
- If you do this, be sure to leave time for discussion, and emphasize that what they learned can guide the goals they set in their Personal Health Plan\
- You can also send this with them as homework

# Your Living Space

- Homelessness affects health VA can help
- Picture yourself where you will sleep tonight
- Think of has this place affects your senses
  - Sights lighting
  - Sounds noise, music
  - Smells
  - Temperature

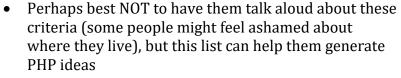


- Be sure to give voice to the idea that many Veterans are homeless. VA has markedly reduced the number of homeless Veterans in the past several years
- Invite people to share things they like and dislike about their homes especially, where they sleep

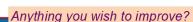
### Your Living Space:

#### Ask Yourself These Questions

- · Is it dry enough?
- · Clean?
- Pest-free?
- Safe? Are there fall risks?
- Unpolluted (smoke, radon)?
- · Good air flow?
- Maintained broken things fixed?



- Pests might include roaches, bed bugs, mold, hobo spiders, etc.
- You can ask the question on the bottom of the slide out loud, or just let them read it to have some food for thought





- One important aspect of living space and all of the spaces where we spend our time (indoors at least) is how organized it is
- This can have a huge effect on mental state, hygiene, and safety (e.g., from falls)

Don't ask these questions with the expectation of an

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#### **Getting Organized**

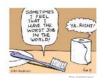
- How cluttered is your place?
  - Tidiness
  - Messiness
    - Clutter can cause falls
  - Hoarding
    - 5% of people
  - Can be treated
  - Squalor
    - Accumulation of garbage
- Who could help?

- answer. Best not to put people on the spot on this topic
  Hoarding is usually tied to some sort of mental health issue, like obsessive compulsive disorder, and can be treated
  - Sometimes, people will volunteer to help Veterans with organizing/cleaning their homes. Ask about local resources
  - Squalor usually tied to substance use, dementia, or other health issues
  - Even just tidying a little each day can be a useful goal
  - Work environment is also important to good health
  - Acknowledge that not everyone works outside their home – can think of this in terms of where you work in your home too



#### **Work Surroundings**

- Could be about finding a place to work
- Health is better if you have more control at work, and reasonable demands
- · Consider vocational rehab
- Ergonomics matters
- Coworker relationships
- · Workaholism?



- Be sure to read the comic hard to see text ]
- Mention that if people are looking for jobs, anything that helps with that could be a helpful Personal Health Plan goal
- People actually live longer if they have jobs they like, if they have control, feel fulfilled, and don't have excess stress
- Vocational training is offered in many VA's look into options at your facility
- Working shouldn't be uncomfortable either physically (e.g., repetitive use injuries), or in terms of your coworkers
- Many people struggle with being addicted to working. Workaholism can be an issue for many people (8-18%). There is a clinical tool about this in the Whole Health Library



- People sometimes aren't as sure about what emotional surroundings are
- Ask them for their thoughts, as time allow

#### **Emotional Surroundings**

- Violence and abuse are common • 35% of women, 29% men



- PTSD
- Depression, anxiety
- · Information overload
- Sensitivity
  - Over 10% people are introverted or highly tuned in
- Is there enough humor? Fun?

- This slide illustrates some possible examples of how emotional surroundings can play a role
- Be sure to mention safety and domestic violence
- Note that Surroundings may trigger emotional states like depression, but usually it is important to work on "internal" causes of mood problems as well
- Information overload ties into hearing negative news all the time – a media 'fast' can help. There is a Veteran handout about this in the Whole Health Library
- Humor is covered more in the Personal Development course, but is worth a mention her as well





Demonstration: Animal Assisted Therapy

- Ideally, this would be an opportunity to do some animal assisted therapy, if you can bring someone in with a therapy animal
- You can set the stage with info from the Whole Health Library at <a href="https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/tools/animal-assisted-therapies/">https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/tools/animal-assisted-therapies/</a>. Alternatively, you could consider having someone do an aromatherapy demo (make sure your facility allows that)



 We have talked about places we enjoy and ways to make other places more user-friendly, but what about places that truly bring about healing?

# Mindful Awareness-Your Healing Place...



- You are welcome to choose to do this or not
- · It should feel safe and relaxing
- You will be visualizing a place that is healing for you
- · What makes it healing?
- You can stop anytime you wish

- There is a script in the course materials you can read to facilitate this mindful awareness exercise
- Let them know it is fine to use any of the places they have thought about earlier in this course
- The space may be in a hospital or other building, but it can be anywhere, like the beach shown on the slide, or a place from a childhood memory
- Be sure to give them time after the exercise to talk about what this experience was like for them
- If time allows, have them share about their experience with a partner



- Ask them what it is about a space that makes it more or less healing. Earlier slides talked about the two different views out the window. What about what is going on inside the room, not just the view?
- We might not always be able to say what it is, but we know when a place is more –or less - healing.
   Compare this place...



- ...to this one. What makes this one better?
- Give people time. You may want to toggle back and forth between this slide and the previous one so they can contrast the two even more
- This is the same room before and after it became a consultation room in the University of Arizona Integrative Medicine Clinic
- Some things to highlight: lighting, art, color, natural materials, flooring, visibility of medical instruments
- All sorts of factors make surroundings either support
   or impair our healing
- This also holds true for hospital rooms, as well as clinic rooms (or our bedrooms for that matter)
- This is a bed from a pediatric ward in UCSF
- You can leave this slide and the next one out if you are pressed for time

# What Makes a Space Healing?



- Sights colors, levels
- Sounds quiet noises, white r
- Smells fragra smoke, fresh a
- Touch comfo furniture, tem sounds, smells, couch light



What Else Makes a Space Healing?



- Nature
- People
- Choice
- Knowing where you are
- Feels a little like a home

 And this highlights some of the things the designers went for in the room. It is hard to see in the picture – you may want to read them aloud

 Knowing where you may be something most people can take for granted, but if you are confused for some reason, that can be a big issue. Good signage in places like hospitals is also important



- We've been discussing adding in pleasant and positive. In addition, it helps to remove things that are causing harm
- There is a "detox" clinical tool featured in the Passport, Chapter 6, which can be helpful when talking about this topic

#### **About Detox**

- Many Veterans have exposures
  - -Shrapnel, Agent Orange, radiation
- Not a lot of gimmicky detox methods work. These do:
  - Drink fluids
  - Exercise
  - Eat healthy whole foods are best
  - Saunas can be good if done safely
  - Get sleep
  - Avoid exposures, including smoke



- Be sure to emphasize that avoiding toxins is probably the best way to go, combined with doing good overall self-care
- The fewer chemicals in your food, your air, and your water, the better. We just don't know enough about many of the chemicals in our environment
- People try enemas and special drinks and various detox machines, but there just isn't a lot of good research to support their use thus far
- Let's transition back to the external environment again. Nature and health are closely linked
- This topic is one that can be very popular with Veterans when they are setting Whole Health goals
- It can include time out in the mountains or woods, or it can be time sitting on your porch or walking in the park – you decide



### Imagine a pill like this...



http://www.nature-rx.org/nature-rx-part-1/

- Watch the video in advance and make sure you feel it is okay to show to your group. There is a swear word that is "bleeped" out, and he goes skinny dipping (with his backside pixelated)
- Showing a video means you need to have the computer you are presenting from attached to speakers – usually not a problem if the room has good AV support
- The video can be stopped at 1:12 the rest is just where you can go to learn more about the video



### Surroundings: Why Bother?

Living close to green space is good



People who live closer to green spaces live longer and have fewer heart attacks and strokes

Three days in nature, and your brain works better

- Key point: Time in nature is good for your health. You live longer
- The research in this area has been done on tens of thousands of people over the years
- The picture of a soldier stationed in Iraq who had his wife send him dirt, fertilizer, and grass seeds so he could smell fresh-cut grass and feel it grow beneath his feet

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# Let's discuss: How can you get more nature time?

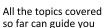


- This can make for a good large group discussion, but you can have people pair up if you choose
- If a person doesn't live close to nature, they can still bring more nature into their lives (e.g., a deck garden, houseplants, or fresh flowers)



• Let's move into the final topic, which is really a list of single changes you can make to make Surroundings a part of your Personal Health Plan

# Set a Goal! Make One Small Change



- Change home
- Get organized
- · Change work
- Improve emotional surroundings
- · Create a healing space
- Remove/heal from toxins
- Get nature time

#### Some more examples:

- · Plant a tree
- Paint a wall
- Put a plant on your desk
- Take a media break
- Clean up the roadside
- De-clutter
- Add art
- Get a carbon monoxide detector

- Ask them if they have other thoughts, beyond the list on the slide
- You can either read all of the bulleted suggestions, or just let them read them as you highlight a few of your favorites

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#### The temptation is always to spend more time on Your Turn lecture and less on experiential activities or skill-· Work with a partner building. Give this last exercise at least 10-15 minutes · Take turns Some people may be hesitant, but encourage them to • Each person will come up work with someone else if at all possible. If not, they with a goal related to their Surroundings can still set a goal on their own, and you can check in You will be invited to with them while others are working in pairs share yours with the group If there are an odd number of people, you can always • How will you follow up? jump into the mix and pair with someone yourself Be sure to set a timer to remind them to switch who is doing the talking/planning Take time for a large group discussion, and invite people to share \*Be sure to focus on accountability – how can they check in with their partner (text, coffee, email, etc.)? When? Can you as the instructor check in with them at some point? Be sure to talk about their next steps with all of this work You can leave this slide up while they are talking to **Setting Goals** their partner. It can help them create stronger goals Seven steps in goal setting SMART Goals 1. Identify the goal Specific 2. Know the benefits Measurable 3. Know obstacles · Action-based 4. List skills and knowledge needed Realistic 5. Identify who can help Time-bound 6. Develop a plan (SMART) 7. Set a timeline and next Feel free to modify this based on which points you Surroundings – Summing Up chose to emphasize 1. Start with what matters 2. Any activity is great, and Working the Body can mean many things 3. Tailor the plan to YOU! 4. Know resources, community programs, and other options 5. Be safe 6. Ask for help and support



- As you finish, be sure to leave time for questions and comments
- There is a general evaluation form you can provide copies of when the course is finished, provided as part of the course materials